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ABSTRACT

One of a series of pre-apprenticeship phase 1 training modules, this self-paced student training module deals with the importance of good communication skills and ways of improving skill in listening and in being listened to. Included in the module are the following: cover sheet listing module title, goals, and performance indicators; introduction; study guide/check list with directions for module completion; information sheet discussing active listening and expressing one's feelings directly and effectively; self-assessment; self-assessment answers; and post assessment. Emphasis of the module is on the two-sided nature of communication as well as on the right and obligation of the individual to assure that communication is a two-way process. (Other related pre-apprenticeship phase 1 training modules are available separately--see note.) (MN)

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ED217259

INDIVIDUALIZED LEARNING SYSTEMS

PRE-APPRENTICESHIP PHASE 1 TRAINING.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Goal:

The student will learn the importance of good communication skills. He or she will read about ways of improving skill in listening to other people and in being listened to.

Performance Indicators:

The student will read and discuss the information given in the Introduction and Information sections, then will complete the written assignment and the role play in small groups.

CE032 895

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Introduction

Communication is a two-way process; one person initiates and the other person responds. There is no communication if you are by yourself in the wilderness. This module emphasizes the two-sided nature of communication: listening actively to others, hearing not only what you want to hear, but what the other person means, and, ensuring that you, yourself, are treated with respect and listened to when it is important to be heard. It is your right and obligation to make sure that communication <u>is</u> two-way.

Study Guide

This module is about communication skills. Being able to listen actively to other people and ensure that you are listened to is essential for good, two-way communication. Most of us work with other people, and these skills will help you get along and get ahead with your fellow workers and people in supervisory positions. To complete this module, follow the guide below. Please check off the assignments as you complete them.

1.____Read the Introduction and Information sections carefully. Discuss within your class anything you are not clear about or that you wish to discuss.

2.____Complete the Self Assessment and compare your answers with those suggested on the Self Assessment Answer sheet. Discuss, with a partner, and, if necessary, with your instructor, any answers with which you disagree.

3.____Complete the Post Assessment. Your instructor will need to divide the class, preferably into groups of three. Follow the instructions at the top of the Post Assessment sheet and practice the skills in the given situation. Report to your instructor when you have finished, and before continuing with another module.

Information

Are you a good listener? Do other people listen to you when you want to say something important?

It is essential to be aware of and to practice skills in communication. They are the most important social skills, and as most of us work with other people, they are essential in our jobs as well. They are at the center of human relations training and the very core of respect for the rights of individuals. More problems and difficulties between people occur from poor communication than from any other area of human experience.

We are born with the ability to communicate our own needs, but we have to learn how to hear and respond to others. What often happens is that during our early childhood training we are made to feel guilty about this inborn ability to ask clearly for what we want--it is labeled as aggressive, impolite and selfish. Of course, there are more appropriate ways to make our needs felt than screaming and crying, but the direct honest communication of babies is something we can still learn from. There is not even much encouragement to acquire the skills of genuine and active listening to others. Most of us know that the experience of being "told off" or of being very bored by someone who has power over us teaches us only to be quiet and to appear to be listening without necessarily understanding or wanting to understand. We are likely to feel that we have been done violence to by not being allowed to express ourselves, especially any negative feelings, and we begin to feel resentful and disinterested in giving anyone else the attention and understanding that we, ourselves, do not feel we are receiving.

We are told, very early on, about the importance of listening to, understanding

and acting on communication that is initiated by higher status individuals (e.g. parents, teachers, supervisors, etc.). It still is the most efficient and productive way of initiating action. However, you are also entitled to communicate what is important to you, and that is what this module and the exercises should help you to do: communicate better, not only with your fellow students or co-workers, but also with people in authority.

When other people sense that you really are listening to what they are saying (to their feelings and their words), they feel valued and respected. When you get the same, honest attention paid to what you are saying, you are likely to feel good about yourself and the other person. Everyone benefits and gets along better.

First of all, we will look at active listening. This has been divided into two areas: centering attention on the other person and checking ideas and feelings.

Center your attention on the other person rather than on your own response or whatever you may be reminded of in your experiences. Try to understand why the subject matter is important to the other person. Think of the other person as someone you are trying to gain knowledge from. This involves openly showing you are listening, keeping your eyes directed most of the time toward the other person, avoiding distractions, such as looking over his or her shoulder at other people. (If the other person really is very boring, then it will be necessary to practice your skills at being listened to.) Think of some of the ways that your body language and use of voice might indicate to someone that you are not listening actively, e.g. slumped body, dull tone of voice, scratching, picking your nose, etc. Watch how people at home and in the community express, with their body, as well as their voices, their interest or lack of interest when somebody else is speaking to them. The challenge in active listening is to find out as much as possible about what interests the other person (as much as the other person is willing to divulge). Take it as a challenge to find out what is really important to the other person; you will discover that even in day-to-day activities each of us is living according to very firmly established values and beliefs. By listening actively, you not only understand the other person, but you flatter him or her at the same time.

Here's an example:

A. "I went to the ball game last night."

B. (assumes mistakenly it is the game that interests A) "Who won?"

A. "Ems. 4-0."

B. "Oh." (not knowing anything about baseball and thinking this was what A wanted to communicate, B comes to a bored and boring stop.)

Here is the same situation that resulted in a different quality of communication:

A. "I went to the ball game last night."

B. (noticing A says this without enthusiasm) "I didn't know that was something you enjoy doing."

A. "It isn't. I prefer going fishing but my girlfriend wanted to go."

Now, at this point, there are several possibilities that will help B tap into what really interests A. It would be possible (although probably too threatening, even if it is accurate) to ask, "Does she always make decisions for you?" There are many other less challenging alternatives. Here are a few:

a) "Great. Where do you go fishing?"

b) "What sort of fishing do you enjoy?"

c) "You seem to like outdoor activities."

d) "Does she go fishing with you?"

e) "Sounds as if that might have been a little boring for you."

f) "Do you usually share your activities?"

The many alternatives available to B do not require specialized knowledge, not even similar background experience. It's possible to carry on an interesting and enthusiastic discussion, using active listening, with a nuclear scientist talking about a complicated theoretical point, if you are able to cue the person into communicating what is important to him or her. In this case, you would probably not understand the content, but you would be responding to the feeling. All that is required is that the active listener has a wish to find out more about the other person. In the example, the possible questions and comments follow on from A says and encourage A to open up and communicate directly.

Checking that you have understood the other person's feelings and ideas. Sometimes, as in the illustration of the scientist whose ideas mean little to

you, the most important thing you can do in understanding another person is to be sensitive to the feelings either expressed, or in underlying the words. However, a complete communication is going to occur when both content or ideas and feelings are recognized and understood. The easiest way to practice this listening skill is to try putting into your own words what seems to be most important to the other person and then asking them whether that is what he or she said. Also, if you think there are feelings that do not match with the content, it is useful to be able to identify what you think are the feelings and again to check with the other person. Both of these listening skills are extremely important when someone is trying to communicate something to you that they believe you should hear. In other words, even though you are still centering attention on what the other person says, it is given added importance because they are trying to focus on you.

Following is an example:

A. "There's something I want to tell you and I don't know where to begin."
B. "It seems to be difficult to tell me."
A. "Yeah. The thing is...and I'm not the only one who says this...I've been asked to tell you...only I don't know how you'll take it."
B. "Sounds as if you're feeling uncertain whether I'll accept what you tell me."
A. "Yeah, I...."

The first response by B checked the content of the words; the second response by B checked the feeling expressed in the hesitant manner of delivering the words, and probably the worried expression on A's face. Remember, even if what you eventually hear is unpleasant, the fact that you are checking the direct and indirect meaning helps the communication process. By doing this, you are making it easier for A and probably making such a favorable impact that you will improve your position when, at last, A gets around to telling you what <u>is</u> the concern. You may have noticed that the aim is to stay in the present, following closely the words and feelings the other person is expressing. Your predictions about what the other person might be talking about are probably not relevant at this stage. Even if you guessed and jumped in with, "Oh, you're criticizing me about-----," you lessen your chances of coming through the ordeal having made a favorable impression for your effort to understand, to give full attention and to take notice. They are all personal skills that will help you get and keep jobs.

Sometimes the feeling content is so obvious that, particularly when it is a negative emotion directed at you, any checking of it would sound like a challenge.

For example:

A. "I'm very angry about what you've done."

The feeling here is clear. You would probably make matters worse if you said, "you seem to be mad at me." A better response would be any of:

B. a) "I'm sorry you're mad at me."

b) "I wish I could change how you feel toward me."

c) "Can I do anything to help change your feelings about me?"

Now it is <u>your turn to be listened to.</u> The way in which this is going to happen is by asserting your rights as an individual to the same respect that you give the other person. Developing the communication skills that ensure that you are listened to and get what you believe you deserve, is essential at work and in everyday life. At work, it is important when:

*you need help, more instruction, guidance from supervisors, journeymen and fellow apprentices

*you want to end something that you feel is not respectful to you as an individual, e.g. continued jokes about you, bullying or other belittling attitudes and comments

*you want to clearly say "yes" to something

*you want to say "no" to other people's requests without feeling guilty

There are some occasions when you just can't get what you want without changing the other person or the place. Sometimes it is better to disagree silently with the boss; this is where the additional skills of tact and diplomacy may be useful. In this case, your interest in asking your boss not to blow cigar smoke at you might be overridden by another interest--keeping your job. There are also work settings where you might find a similar conflict of personal interests in dealing with a customer who, as a professional, you know is nearly always right. Imagine you are a floor layer who sees that a customer has bought cheap material that will not last long. In this situation you have an obligation to respect the customer, and your expression of opinion about the material comes second. Even if the customer asks, "What do you think of the carpet?", a skillful answer incorporates what you have learned about active listening; you check what is behind the

question, which, in this instance, is probably a request for reassurance.

For example:

"It will look marvelous when I've installed it."

or

"It seems like a good buy, for the money you paid."

So, it isn't necessary that you express everything you feel; that would be no advance over what a three-year-old child does. The guideline is to identify when you feel your rights as an individual are being seriously questioned, when you are being treated with less than appropriate respect. As an apprentice, you can expect to take some knocks, but you still have a right and a duty to your own self-respect to correct a situation or relationship where you are continuously being 'put down.' When you feel a situation is getting worse, and you fear for your job, check with your co-workers; they may have the same feelings. If the trouble is something that can be changed for the better, you have nothing to lose. It is important to speak out and there is a well-proven way of doing it--and not only surviving, but winning.

The skill of being listened to involves avoiding, at all costs, becoming aggressive and threatening to the other person. If you are aggressive, it sounds like an ultimatum and the other person is given two choices: surrender or fight. Most people will fight, or will give in and resent you; either way, you have lost. The skillful way gives the other person a face-saving way out; it shows respect for him or her at all times.

Take, for example, complaining to the boss when he or she makes an unreasonable request. Maybe your boss has asked you to run a personal errand during your lunchtime. If you don't want to do this, you do have the choice of speaking out and being listened to. Here's the procedure to follow:

1. Show your boss you understand what is important to him or her.
2. Take responsibility for your own feelings.
3. Suggest a politely-worded, alternative action.

For example:

"Excuse me, I wonder if I could have a word with you. It's about the errands you've asked me to run. I realize that you are very busy, that they are

important to you and I would like to help. I'm not sure why, but I'm feeling upset about losing my lunchtime. I use that time to relax and eat so I can work hard in the afternoon. I wonder if I could run that errand after 2 o'clock.

It would be difficult for any person to respond to this request in other than a reasonable manner.

Here's another example where you feel you are not getting the supervision you would like. Follow the same formula:

1. Show your understanding of the other person's position
2. Openly take responsibility for your own feelings
3. Suggest, politely, an alternative to the present situation

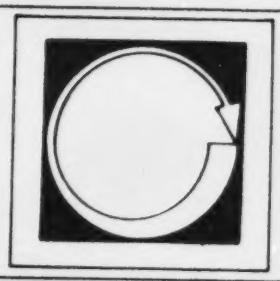
"Excuse me, Bob. Have you got a minute? I know you're busy and maybe I'm unfair in feeling that I'm missing out on my training, but there is a lot I want to learn and practice; much more than I'm doing now. Would you please, if you don't have the time, ask someone else to give me some instruction for a few minutes twice a day? Thanks a lot, Bob."

Here is an example showing the skill of saying "no," while avoiding threatening the other person, and while maintaining your sense of self-worth.

A. "I'm in a hurry to leave early. Can you punch the clock for me?"
B. "I can see you're in a rush, and I may be silly about feeling pressured into something I don't agree with, but I'd appreciate it--even though you're in a hurry--if you could do it yourself this time."

Underlying all of these suggestions for skilled communication is the principle of respect. Try to maintain respect for your fellow workers and uphold your own sense of self-respect. This makes for communication between equals. Even if you are not equal in work skills, experience, status, money, you are equal in your individual worth. Show you believe in other people and show you believe in yourself; being able to communicate, with honesty and respect, to each other, demonstrates that belief.

Self Assessment

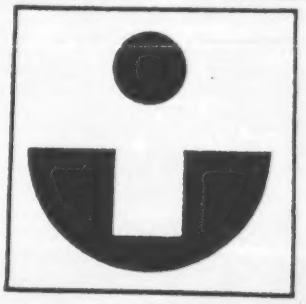


Here are some descriptions of different ways of communicating with--and responding to--other people. In the spaces provided, write a T if it describes how you might feel or behave, and F if you would act or feel in a very different way.

1. ___When someone, other than a close friend, is speaking to me, I have difficulty in concentrating on what he or she is saying.
2. ___When friends ask me to do something for them, I find it very difficult to refuse even when it is very inconvenient for me to do it.
3. ___If a person is talking about some subject I know very little about, it is hard communicating with them.
4. ___I believe that everyone is interesting, especially when they are communicating what is of great interest to them.
5. ___It is important to listen to the feelings that people are expressing, as well as to the words.
6. ___When I don't like what someone is doing, I can't bring myself to tell them so.
7. ___I want to feel independent, strong and self-reliant.
8. ___I usually fit in with what other people tell me to do even when I don't agree with it.
9. ___I prefer to be looked after by someone else; it's too scary to stand up for myself.
10. ___Even if I feel I'm being taken advantage of by a friend, it's better to keep the peace and say nothing.
11. ___When someone gives full attention to what I am saying, it makes me feel understood, and that's a very positive feeling.
12. ___If I get angry, it's always someone else's fault.
13. ___It's often the impolite way in which things are said that makes a request sound more like a demand.
14. ___Understanding what someone means to say is a skill that can be learned.
15. ___It's not enough to listen, it's important for the other person to know that you are listening.

16.___It's possible to listen actively to someone and glance at a magazine at the same time.

Self Assessment Answers



1. F
2. F
3. F
4. T
5. T
6. F
7. T
8. F
9. F
10. F
11. T
12. F
13. T
14. T
15. T
16. F

Post Assessment

In completing this section, it's better if you can work in groups of three people. One person will be A, another B, and the third will be an observer. Make sure that each person practices active listening and being listened to at least three times each. If you want, think up some situations for yourself and rehearse those. Discuss, each time with the help of the observer, how successful the communication was.

1. Practice in active listening.
   a. B asks A what he or she did last week-end.
   b. B asks A about a hobby or other interest.
   c. A tells B about something he or she has felt angry about.
   d. A tells B about a time when he or she really felt happy.

2. Practice in being listened to.
   a. Your friend's father asks some searching questions about his son or daughter; you don't want to give any information.
   b. A dentist keeps you waiting an hour; you want to complain and suggest an alternative.
   c. You buy a stereo that breaks down within two weeks of purchase. You take it back and ask for a refund or exchange.
   d. You ask a journeyman not to give you only the tasks he doesn't want.